CHAPTER XVII

SOCIAL LIFE AND ORGANIZATION

ONE of the outstanding characteristics of Chinese civilization has been its emphasis upon social relations. Chinese philosophy, as we have seen, has had as a leading objective the achievement and maintenance of an orderly society. Confucianism, so long dominant in the state and in the intellectual and moral life of the Empire, has laid great stress upon right relations among human beings. In the course of the centuries the Chinese have developed many institutions and customs to conserve and perpetuate society, to give joint protection to individuals, and to facilitate the inter-* course of the many millions who have formed the population of the Empire. The most extensive of these organizations, the Government, has been described in a previous chapter. Some others, especially the guilds, have also been portrayed. It remains to give an account of the more important institutions which thus far have been only mentioned. It would also seem to be in place to associate with these some of the customs and principles of social intercourse and some of the features of collective life, such as recreation and holidays, which are not readily grouped elsewhere,

It must be said at the outset that it is difficult and in many instances quite impossible to formulate generalizations which will prove applicable to all China. In spite of the tendency to uniformity throughout the country, amazing for so huge a mass of mankind, almost any statement may prove to be untrue for a

particular locality. This is especially the case today, for one must reckon not only with the variations which formerly existed but with the changes induced by the coming of the Occident and which have by no means uniformly affected different districts and classes. What, therefore, may be a correct description of one community may not fit elsewhere and what may be an accurate picture of one class or individual may be quite inappropriate for another, even in the same city or *hsien.*